

Michael Pickering
49 Town Furze
OXFORD OX3 7EW

CHILDHOOD

Your stream was for nine-year-old me a morris dance
of white and pitch-roving men: I scuttled and scrambled
along its rapids, I was skipping, and slapping with sticks
the rough-ridden water, a slap-sticked fool at Shrovetide!

Later, however, me alone, you gone, home under rain
there was still a tilth of whispery tidings; even now
fun over the pitted like kittens' paw-marks black and white
flint, fun up and over the often home-going hill.

Soft plummy piles of duck sleeping, olive-sleek, pike-heaped
in pathside hollows were black and green, squabbling also;
A little jolly black dog dashed after a pheasant,
an umber doddering worm scrolled by the scrabbling brook.

I rhyme in my memory now what I ran for you then:
syllables run out of breath to fall over their own feet.